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# **Dancing Toward Belonging: The use of a dance intervention to influence migrant pupils' sense of belonging in school**

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# **Dancing Toward Belonging: The use of a dance intervention to influence migrant students' sense of belonging in school**

With growing hostility towards migrants in the UK, it is ever more important for schools to promote cohesion and wellbeing amongst their diverse pupils. Research has shown the influence of dance interventions on positive psychological and physical wellbeing. The aim of this study was to examine whether dance might influence the wellbeing of migrant pupils, in particular their sense of belonging, given evidence linking this basic human need to positive educational outcomes. Migrant secondary school pupils took part in a dance intervention and qualitative methods were used to explore their experiences. Findings indicated that participation in the dance intervention fostered opportunities for pupils to connect with each other, to feel safe and engage meaningfully, all factors that have been linked with sense of belonging. The study gives strength to the use of dance to support the psychological wellbeing of newly arrived migrant pupils.

Keywords: sense of belonging; migrant; dance; school; wellbeing.

## **Introduction**

The rise of immigration to the UK over the last two decades, particularly influenced by increases in migration from the European Union (EU) (Migration Watch 2016a) and in asylum seekers (Migration Observatory 2016), has led to an increase in migrant children within schools. This paper uses the United Nations' definition of a migrant as 'someone who changes his or her country of usual residence for a period of at least a year', including those who migrate for reasons employment, family formation and asylum seeking (Migration Watch, 2007). The United Nations estimates that 15% of all of the world's migrants are children and young people (Sime 2017). In 2015, 15 per cent of state-funded secondary school pupils did not speak English as a first language (Migration Watch 2016b). The increase in the number of migrant children within UK schools has coincided with a growth in hostility towards immigration – in 2014 77 percent of people polled said they wanted to see a reduction of immigration into Britain. Hostility towards immigration was an important factor influencing the vote to leave the EU in 2016 (Migration Watch 2016).

The danger of marginalising migrant children through perceived 'otherness' has been documented (Gaulter and Green 2015; Sime 2017) and could contribute to the hostility migrant pupils face. Schools have increasingly been identified as places that can address such hostility towards immigration through fostering social cohesion (Zachos 2017; Chiong and Menzies

2016) – a term that has been defined in terms of people from different backgrounds sharing a sense of belonging (SOB) and working towards a common goal (DCSF 2007). There has been a growth of research into how SOB and social cohesion can be fostered in schools. For instance, Phillips, Tse and Johnson (2010) reported on the main approaches being used in schools to develop social cohesion, among which were the use of enrichment and extra-curricular activities. This study aimed to consider the SOB of migrant pupils within a UK secondary school and in particular explore how an enrichment activity of dance might influence their SOB.

### ***Sense of belonging***

Sense of belonging (SOB) has been defined as the extent to which individuals feel personally accepted, respected, included and supported by others in their social environment (Baumeister and Leary 1995). Seen as a basic human need (e.g. Maslow 1943), SOB is related to positive psychological, academic and social outcomes.

In the UK, Tony Blair's government began to recognise the importance of SOB in their guidance on the school's duty to 'promote community cohesion' (DCSF 2007). This guidance suggests that schools contribute to SOB through the curriculum (e.g. teaching citizenship and life-skills), by encouraging equality, and through engagement of extended services. In 2010 the Equalities Act was passed which placed a statutory duty on all schools to support community cohesion through providing fair access to educational opportunities for all students (Chiong and Menzies 2016).

Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs is a key theory underpinning the concept of SOB. Maslow (1987) referred to the need to belong as the social desire to be connected with other human beings and to feel accepted by a group. Based on empirical research and theory, Baumeister and Leary (1995) conceptualised their 'belonging hypothesis', which identified that social contact alone is not sufficient to satisfy humans' motivation to belong but rather depends upon 'regular social contact with those to whom one feels connected' (501). They defined SOB as 'a pervasive drive to form and maintain at least a minimum quantity of lasting, positive and significant interpersonal relationships' (Baumeister and Leary 1995, 497).

There is growing literature exploring SOB within school. Prince and Hadwin (2012) report that SOB within a school context links to beliefs that school is important, positive relationships with peers and teachers, and opportunities to be involved in school life. Goodenow (1993) defined pupils' SOB within school as 'the extent to which pupils feel personally accepted, respected, included and supported by others in the school environment' (80). Kia-Keating and

Ellis (2007) found that sense of belonging is especially important for the settlement of young refugees in school. Additionally, Gaultier and Green (2015) suggest that helping migrant pupils to find SOB is not just positive for pupils but also helps to lessen staff anxieties 'because [staff] no longer [see] the children as 'others' who ha[ve] a different culture that require[s] a different approach' (110). Such research suggests that there are significant benefits to fostering SOB in migrant pupils and more research is required to promote its wide-spread practice.

### *Effects of SOB on school outcomes*

In recent years psychologists have identified the link between schooling and SOB. Chiu et al. (2012) assert that SOB is 'an emotional aspect of school engagement that represents pupils' feelings of being connected to the school' (1410). Bond et al. (2007) found that young people who reported high SOB in early secondary school were less likely to experience later mental health problems and more likely to have positive academic outcomes. Osterman (2000) found a strong link between pupils' SOB within school and their levels of perceived competence in comparison to those with lower SOB. More recently, Prince and Hadwin (2012) identified that SOB links to student motivation, engagement, academic achievement and school completion.

While there is much research linking SOB within school little research explores the link between school belonging and immigration. Research has shown that migrant pupils experience greater disadvantages than native pupils in the form of fewer educational resources at home, language barriers, and poorer relationships with peers and teachers (Chiu et al. 2012; Sime 2017). Whilst migrant pupils, particularly first-generation migrants, tend to have better attitudes towards school, they have a lower SOB, and there are strong negative links between SOB and the disadvantages of migrant pupils listed above (Chiu et al. 2012). Schools have a key role in fostering positive attitudes and feelings amongst migrant pupils and these in turn can influence their long-term psychological wellbeing and inclusion within society.

Georgiades, Boyle and Fife (2013) described immigration as a 'life-altering experience that may entail extensive loss of family and friends, customs and surroundings, and the need to adapt to a new cultural environment that often includes different moral values, standards and a new language' (1475). They found a strong negative association between migrant pupils' SOB and emotional and behavioural problems. Similarly Biggart, O'Hare and Connolly (2013) found that migrant children from the EU displayed more negative outcomes in a range of areas when compared with their native peers but those that were statistically significant included the pupils' SOB at school, self-perceptions and lack of participation in clubs.

Such results are troubling for migrant children in school but early research suggest that schools can combat such issues. Georgiades, Boyle and Fife (2013) found evidence suggesting that more opportunities for migrant pupils to affiliate with peers who shared a similar ethnic background to their own identity facilitated feelings of belongingness and connection to their school. Zachos (2017) found that teachers' attitudes and perceptions could impact on migrant pupils' school experiences and Torbjørnsen (2017) makes an argument for inclusive teaching practices when migrant pupils first arrive in schools.

Given such evidence highlighting the impact of teachers' perceptions and inclusive practices on migrant children, appropriate teaching and learning strategies need to be encouraged and employed. Ffas, Sokolowska and Darmody (2015) collected information about educational support for newly arrived migrant pupils in Ireland and Sime (2017) collected information about educational support for migrant pupils in Scotland. Both investigations identified a range of structures used by schools to support newly arrived migrant pupils including mentoring systems, pastoral care teams, flexibility of resource allocation and equal access to curriculum and school activities. Sport and extracurricular activities were identified as less formalised measures regularly used to help newly arrived migrant pupils settle in school and increase their SOB.

### ***Dance to foster SOB***

The use of dance as a means of engaging young people and improving wellbeing has been widely researched. Extensive exploration exists examining the use of dance to improve physical and mental health (eg. Connolly, Quin and Redding 2011; Mavrovouniotis et al 2016; Sivvas et al 2005; Jeong et al 2005) and to reach marginalised communities (eg. Anwar-McHnery, Carmichael and McHenry 2017; Zitomer 2016, 2013; Dinold and Zitomer 2015). Dance has been used to engage young people and enhance critical thinking skills (e.g. Stinson 1997, 2001; Giguere 2011) and bring communities together to improve quality of life (Malkogeorgos, Zaggelidou<sup>[1]</sup> and Georgescu 2011).

While enhanced SOB has been one of many outcomes from the inclusion of disabled dancers into dance settings (Zitomer 2016, 2013), there is a significant gap in research using dance to integrate new or recent arrivals of migrant children within UK schools. Preliminary research looking at the impact of arts programmes, including dance, on young refugees in Australia (Sonn, Grossman and Utomo 2013) demonstrates promising results and offers a reasonable justification to attempt such an intervention in the context of this study.

The use of dance as an extra-curricular intervention has many potential benefits, most notably the improvement of physical and mental wellbeing. Whether or not this study improved migrant pupils' SOB, participants would become involved in an activity proven to improve health and wellbeing. Examples of such evidence include a study conducted with fifty-five 14 year old females from a number of UK secondary schools which found that a contemporary dance intervention improved participants' health and wellbeing and most significantly self-esteem (Connolly, Quin and Redding 2011). Similarly a study examining the impact of a dance intervention on teenage participants' mental health found a decrease in mental dissatisfaction in participants (Jeong et al 2005). These two examples of research serve, in part, as a rationale for the use of dance in this study.

In their systematic review examining physical activity amongst youth, Robertson-Wilson, Reinders, and Bryden (2016) found that 'subgroups of ethnic minorities, girls, and older adolescents typically demonstrate[ed] lower levels of activity than non-minorities, boys, and younger individuals' (170). At minimum, the use of dance within the migrant population would do no harm to participants and could, if nothing else, increase their physical activity.

## **Methods**

The objective of the present study was to explore how participating in a dance programme at school influenced migrant pupils' SOB within school. The research team consisted of two researchers – an Educational Psychologist who had strong links to schools within a Local Authority (LA) in South East England and expertise in using qualitative methods to research the experiences of migrant pupils, and a Lecturer and Researcher in the Faculty of Education at the Royal Academy of Dance with expertise in dance education and using qualitative methods in dance intervention research settings. The former researcher was involved in recruiting a school and participants and the latter responsible for devising and delivering the dance sessions. Both researchers were responsible for data collection and analysis.

The research took place in a secondary school situated in a South East England LA that had seen a rapid increase in the number of international migrant pupils over recent years. In the 2011 census, 11 percent of residents of this LA were born outside of the UK, whereas in 2001 only 6.2 percent of residents were born outside of the UK. The number of pupils attending this school with English as an additional language (EAL) had almost doubled between 2011 and 2014 (5.5% to 9.5 %). The school was situated in a socially deprived area as indexed by almost half of pupils on roll being eligible for the pupil premium, evidenced in their 2016 Ofsted report.

The school identified pupils who had migrated to the UK in the last three years. Thirteen pupils originating from a range of countries and aged between eleven and fifteen consented to taking part. Pupils had varying levels of English language with some having little or no English.

The intervention consisted of six sixty-minute dance classes exploring hip hop styles as selected by the participants. The dance sessions began using a cued response teaching style (Gibbons 2007) allowing participants to ‘copy’ before becoming more pupil-led as participants gained experience and improved in self-esteem. Small group tasks were included to encourage collaborative work between pupils and allow for a sense of simultaneous ownership and sharing (Dinold and Zitomer 2015). By the final session, pupils performed choreography that they had devised alongside work that had been set on them and had been refined throughout the sessions. This scaffolding of pupils’ independent participation was selected to allow for pupils to feel confident and capable with a ‘new’ experience (Gibbons 2007).

### *Data Collection*

Given the reflexive and flexible nature of qualitative research, which allows for personal reflection and is neither bound by nor subject to a rigid set of guidelines, a qualitative design seemed most appropriate for this small-scale research. Qualitative research provides an in-depth understanding of the realities of individuals or groups within a natural setting (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2011; Creswell 2014). Qualitative data was collected from a variety of sources at the end of the dance programme. Semi-Structured focus groups were held with the students who participated, consisting of no more than six students in a group. Given White and Bushin’s (2011) emphasis that research with migrant children should incorporate methods that are less reliant on spoken word, other modes of communication were used to help self-expression during these focus groups. These included photo-elicitation methods (students were shown photos of the dance sessions), drawings and music (tracks used during the dance sessions were played). Interviews were held with the staff members overseeing the research and the staff member with responsibility for students with EAL. Data was also collected through the two researchers’ observations and field diaries.

Gathering the perspectives of both staff and pupils and using a variety of data collection methods strengthened the data and analysis. Once data collection had concluded data was organised, coded, grouped and then re-analysed through the qualitative data software MAXQDA.



## **Results**

When analysing the data of this study three key findings emerged: connecting with others, feeling safe and engagement. These findings link to the overarching theme of enjoyment and best demonstrate the students' experience. Wherever possible these findings have been cross-referenced through all data collection points to ensure robustness and validity of the findings (Creswell 2014; Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2011; Flick 2007).

### ***Enjoyment***

The overarching theme of enjoyment became immediately apparent through the data analysis phase. Both staff members and pupils commented on their experience of enjoying the dance sessions. One student commented directly on how the dance group made her happy 'Like when we [sic] doing dance and then the other day, I'm happy, I don't know why... It's really funny and you're smiling.' Whether it was the pupils themselves discussing (and laughing about) their experiences, or staff members sharing their excitement at the pupils' desire to attend the sessions, overall enjoyment of the intervention became an umbrella under which the three main findings sit. Since pupil enjoyment is a 'critical factor' in involving and enhancing a pupils' outlook toward education (Lorusso, Pavlovich and Chunlei 2013), without experiencing enjoyment the migrant pupils in our study might not have connected with others, felt safe or engaged in the process.

### ***Connecting with others***

The opportunities to connect with others within the dance sessions were discussed by both pupils and staff. Pupils described how dance extended their connections with their peers; 'I've known [pupil] and just her and then I started like to meet them two and the other girls', one pupil said referring to getting to know the other participants. A number of the pupils described how these connections were sustained beyond the dance sessions, highlighting the strength of these newly formed relationships. One pupil explained how she continued her connection with another pupil in the group on her journey home through sharing their experience and enjoyment of the dance: 'yeh me and [pupil] going home together and we can't stop laughing or talking about the dance.'

Dancing together appeared to provide pupils with opportunities for new and shared experiences that helped to bring them together. One pupil said 'We went first time and I was a little bit shy because I didn't know anyone. And then I just became friends with everyone.'

Pupils also discussed meeting each other at lunch breaks further demonstrating the strength of their relationships. For example, two pupils discussed listening to music played within the sessions together outside of the sessions. The shared experiences created through the dance intervention provided a space to make connections and may have helped to sustain and strengthen the friendships beyond the sessions.

Some of the pupils linked their positive feelings during and beyond the dance sessions to these new friendships, as one pupil explained: 'I'm really happy, it's really funny and you're go home when happy. It's because you're friends.' Part of the enjoyment of the dance sessions arose from the meaningful and positive connections that were facilitated.

Staff members also noticed the new friendships forming between pupils in the group: 'I think it's really good. I've seen the difference in them and they've also made friendship groups within themselves.' This staff member felt that an overarching purpose of the dance group was to provide an experience that everyone could share together and that it overcame potential differences that pupils might observe in each other: 'I think that was the good thing about the dance as well. They did it together. There was no "you're Romanian", "you're Slovakian", "you're this", "you're that".'

Staff members suggested that the dance sessions not only facilitated new connections between the pupils but also between pupils and staff where such connections in the past have been strained. One staff member said:

'I went to get her that time she didn't turn up, she was in Art and she did voluntarily show me the work she'd been doing whereas when I taught her a couple of years ago there was no, we didn't have that kind of relationship at all. I would find it hard to elicit any kind of conversation from her....[Pupil] is getting herself into more trouble across the school but I think that this [the dance intervention] is quite useful because she knows who I am and so if I'm trying to get her to do something in the corridors she's a bit more open to that.'

The openness to a productive relationship seen between staff and students in this example demonstrates how important making connections can be. The dance sessions provided experiences that brought the pupils together and facilitated new friendship groups and relationships with staff that went beyond the sessions.

### ***Feeling safe***

Another key theme that emerged from the data related to the safe environment created within the dance sessions. For instance, a staff member explained that she identified the safety of this environment from observing the girls physically relax: '[I] think she felt quite safe in that environment and she seemed more relaxed, like physically as well.' Another staff member made similar observations, 'And it was really nice that they are relaxing now.'

Further evidence of the pupils feeling safe came from comments about their growth in confidence. One pupil commented on how she felt about herself in the dance sessions: 'it makes you feel like yourself, kind of, I don't know. To not be shy or something.' Another pupil described the change she observed in another pupil: 'and [pupil] she was a bit shy but then she was like, I don't know, just said in lunchtime she was like she liked the dance club and really wanted to go.' This pupil's initial shyness within the sessions grew into an enthusiasm for dancing.

Pupils discussed how the dance sessions helped them to feel more comfortable about themselves and this comfort helping them to overcome initial shyness. One pupil said 'Yeh I was a bit shy but then, I don't know, I just started like, it doesn't matter if I'm shy.' When the researcher asked why this might be, the pupil responded, 'You feel comfortable.'

Staff members also observed this growth in confidence in the pupils: 'I noticed the transition from being very shy to being much more confident girls.' Additionally staff observed this growth in confidence beyond the dance sessions. One staff member talked of a pupil coming out of her shell both within the dance sessions and around school: '[she was] so very very withdrawn and then as she was coming out of her shell in the group you could see that a little bit more around school as well...I think the change was mirrored in both areas with her.' Another staff member talked of a pupil changing how she expressed and represented herself around school: '[Pupil] as well is more kind of positive in the way...that persona is often quite an aggressive expression when she sees you in the corridor but that's a lot more positive now.'

Both the dance sessions and the trusting relationships that they facilitated were associated with helping the pupils to feel safe and confident within this environment. A staff member said, 'they were able to trust and also they realised that they were in a safe environment where they could be who they were.' Such experiences allowed a number of the pupils to feel more comfortable in themselves both in the sessions and around school. For some this safety meant that they were less worried about the judgments of others and presumably linked closely with their engagement with the dance.

## ***Engagement***

The concept of pupil engagement has been widely researched, promoted in schools as well as recommended by government (Cadime et al. 2016; Franklin-Guy and Schnorr 2016; Trawler 2010). Pupil engagement can be defined as ‘participation in educationally effective practices, both inside and outside the classroom, which leads to a range of measurable outcomes’ (Kuhn et al., 2007). Pupil engagement can be marked by vigour, absorption and dedication (Cadime et al. 2016). For the purpose of the forthcoming discussion the findings will be split into these three areas.

### *Vigor*

A presence of vigor was a key indicator of pupil engagement. Vigor, in relation to engagement, can be defined as high levels of energy and resilience while attending to an activity (Cadime et al. 2016). Pupils discussed their experience of vigor, though not using the word, when describing the energy they used and their resilience when participating in the dance sessions. ‘You have to *try*’ one student said, emphasising her effort. Another shared that she’d been working so hard on the dance moves that she’d been dreaming about them in her sleep and added that, ‘I was really stretching my body. I was trying to remember the moves.’ This sense of vigor through energy and desire to get the moves ‘right’ allowed for trial and error, resilience and pupil growth to occur. ‘You have to try and if you do something wrong you have to laugh’ one pupil said and another added, ‘you just learn from them [mistakes]. If you’ve done something wrong we could remember next time not to do it.’

The two staff members interviewed also highlighted the vigor pupils afforded to the dance sessions. ‘They took it [sic] everything that you offered them and they ran with it’ one staff member said. She followed up by discussing how the pupils demonstrated growth in resilience as they worked together to learn the material and perform it, ‘they did it together...And they got in, and they stuck into it and they *did it*.’

### *Absorption*

Absorption in relation to engagement can be defined as being fully concentrated and deeply engrossed while attending to an activity (Cadime et al. 2016). The pupils discussed the phenomenon of being completely absorbed when they were in the dance sessions. In an exchange between two pupils one pupil said, ‘Time goes really fast. Every single session that I’ve been to I was like, it seemed like 5 minutes or something like that’ and another contributed ‘Yeh, when you like something you don’t understand where the time has gone.’

### *Dedication*

Pupil dedication in the dance intervention was perhaps one of the most notable indicators of pupil engagement. The migrant pupils were committed to the sessions and discussed their engagement beyond just the work done within the dance sessions. They shared experiences of practising the dances at home and showing them to family and friends. One pupil shared that she taught the dances to her cousins, another shared that she performed the dances for her friend, while a third pupil told the group that she practised at home with her mum. One pupil talked about the difficulties of being far away from her family who live in another country, something commonly experienced amongst migrant pupils (Georgiades, Boyle and Fife 2013). She shared: 'I can't remember what my cousins look like- [but] he's so excited about me coming home. He's asking my grandpa when are we coming home every hour'. When asked if she would show her cousin and grandpa the dance she exclaimed: 'I'm going to show everyone!'

The willingness to practise and show important family members and friends the dances demonstrates the pupils' dedication and engagement. This phenomenon was also noted by both staff members. One staff member said, 'they loved the dance! They were often putting their heads in saying 'have we got the right room?' 'Have we got the right day?'' The other staff member recalled when the pupils remembered the dates and times of the sessions independently, highlighting the pupils' genuine interest in the sessions. The staff member explained: 'they were taking responsibility for making sure that they got there, which considering its changed a little bit and it's outside their normal timetable shows that they did want to be there.' She continued her analysis on pupil dedication by saying, 'the fact [is] that even as a school we put on a lot of clubs but we really struggle to get the engagement from the students. This has been really successful because it's been something that they've wanted to come to and that's quite unusual.'

### **Discussion**

Given the political, educational and psychological benefits of enhancing pupils' SOB, schools are tasked with finding creative approaches to do so with migrant pupils who struggle with belongingness in schools. We argue that one such creative approach could be dance. Arts Council England suggest that 'anyone can enjoy dancing regardless of their age, background, or if they are disabled or non-disabled, whether or not they have danced before and whatever their shape and size' (2006, 3). This makes dance an ideal tool to improve migrant pupils' SOB. Improvement in this area is linked to 'levels of perceived competence, enjoyment of

school and investment of themselves in the process of learning' (Prince and Hadwin 2012, 249), each of which are arguably reflected in the data collected.

Goodenow (1993) outlines that SOB relates to feelings of being supported by others in the school environment. This support was seen as crucial in Madziva and Thondhlana's (2017) study on the provision of education for Syrian refugees in UK schools. Prince and Hadwin (2012) further argue that SOB involves positive perceptions of teacher-pupil relationships and relationships with peers. Reflecting this social component of SOB, this study demonstrates that the dance sessions facilitated new and stronger connections between pupils that disseminated into wider school life and enhanced the enjoyment pupils experienced. As identified by Baumeister and Leary (1995), SOB is fostered by regular contact with people to whom one feels connected. The pupils talked about how the dance sessions facilitated such opportunities and relationships through frequent shared experiences and enjoyment beyond the sessions as seen when the pupils continued to share and enjoy the dance experience on their way home or at lunchtimes.

The dance intervention supported new positive connections between pupils and staff, which may serve to change or avert the perceived 'us' and 'them' dichotomies between staff and migrant pupils that Gaultier and Green (2015) suggest risk marginalising migrant pupils. In turn these changing perceptions can lead to more positive educational outcomes for migrant pupils, given Zachos's (2016) and Sime's (2017) assertions that teacher perceptions of migrant pupils impact their learning.

The concept of connecting with others is an outcome commonly found in dance intervention research. Participants report feelings of peer acceptance (Zitomer 2016), positive social interactions (Malkogeorgos, Zaggelidou<sup>[11]</sup> and Georgescu 2011), and improved ability to make friends (Dinold and Zitomer 2015). Dance can be seen as an inherently social activity that, due to its collaborative nature, provides opportunities to connect with others and develop together (Giguere 2011). Such findings align with this study.

Some of the pupils discussed feeling safe to make mistakes in front of others, implying the acceptance and respect they perceived to have from others. This finding links with research by Goodenow (1993) who defines SOB in terms of feeling personally accepted and respected by others. Staff commented on pupils 'coming out of their shell' within the sessions and talked of positive changes in the pupils' personas around school. Pupils described how they became less shy and increasingly enthusiastic to take part over the course of the sessions. These results indicate the change in pupils' self-perceptions and confidence within themselves. Biggart, O'Hare and Connolly (2013) found that migrant children from the EU displayed significantly

poorer self-perceptions than their native peers, alongside significantly lower SOB. Given the results found in this study, dance could arguably be a means of enhancing the positive self-perceptions of migrant pupils.

Indeed, dance intervention research has previously been used to enhance positive self-perception. Mavrovouniotis et al (2016) found that participation in a dance intervention offered enhancements in psychological wellbeing, including feelings of safety and reductions in anxiety. Beyond such findings, the provision of an environment in which pupils feel safe is a requirement for all dance teachers. The UK Department for Education (DfE) lists as one of its first teachers' standards that a teacher must: 'establish a safe and stimulating environment for pupils, rooted in mutual respect' (DfE 2012). The emphasis on pupils' sense of feeling safe in dance settings is not only required but also allows room for feelings of positive self-perception.

As previously discussed, the finding of pupil engagement was evidenced through pupil vigor, absorption and dedication to their participation in the dance intervention. Prince and Hadwin (2012) suggest that SOB at school involves a commitment to school and a belief that school is important. The dedication and commitment of the pupils' to the dance sessions was evident from the initiative pupils took to ensuring their consistent and prompt attendance (e.g. making sure they had the right time and arriving promptly) and their continuation of dance practice at home with family. Pupils discussed teaching and performing the dance with family members; this desire to share with others reflects pupils' growing sense of competence from the dance. One's sense of perceived competence has been linked to school SOB (Osterman 2000), giving further weight to dance enhancing psychological factors important for one's SOB in school.

The pupils' willingness to participate in the dance sessions is further support for the use of such an approach to influence SOB in migrant pupils. Reflecting Biggart, O'Hare and Connolly's (2013) findings that migrant children from the EU show less participation in clubs than their peers, the evidence that the pupils in this study not only participated but also became fully absorbed in the experience is encouraging. Whilst participation in extracurricular activities has previously been found to help migrant pupils settle into school life (Ffas, Sokolowska and Darmody 2015), arguably clubs need to create feelings of safety and opportunities for connecting with others to facilitate meaningful engagement, which these dance sessions achieved.

## **Limitations**

One obvious limitation of the study was in its population. The participants were all female and all migrant pupils. This was indicative of the volunteer population rather than targeted research practices. Future studies should look to include male participants and a mixed group of new arrivals alongside British born children to further contribute to this area of study

Another limitation is that this study was not able to record whether pupil engagement affected participant engagement or connection with others in wider school life. This study recommends further data collected in this area.

This study also notes that while multi-faceted data collection methods were used, the use of an independent interpreter would have been beneficial. Related ethical issues would need to be considered carefully if this were adopted.

## **Conclusion**

The results of this study indicate that the pupils were emotionally connected to the dance sessions ('it makes you feel like yourself'), were challenged by it ('you really have to *try*') and had a sense of autonomy when they choreographed and performed their own dance material ('we have friends, we're talking we're laughing, we're doing what we want'). These factors allowed pupils to feel safe, connect with others and engage with the dance sessions in a way that they might not otherwise do in a typical school day. Such opportunities offer migrant pupils rich experiences in connecting with learning, the school and adults in a way that is positive and meaningful. If pupil engagement fosters improved learning experiences and outcomes (Cadime et al. 2016; Franklin-Guy and Schnorr 2016; Trawler 2010) then including a dance club for migrant pupils could be the link that UK schools are missing in encouraging attendance and participation of this population.



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